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THE VIRGIN MARY'S KALEIDOSCOPIC HEART:

FROM SPAIN TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WITH THE IMMACULATE HEART COMMUNITY

Wendy M. Wright, Ph.D.*

And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.
(Luke 2:19)

Scattered liberally about the Catholic devotional landscape of Southern California are varied images of the Virgin Mary in her aspect as the Immaculate Heart. The image is, of course, a globally recognizable one. But its first appearance in the mid-nineteenth century and its unfolding interpretation on the Pacific coast of California are singular. Many images of the Immaculate-hearted Virgin were planted here because of the early presence of the Daughters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary (later known as the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart), a women's community now splintered into several different groups, each of whom looks to Mary and understands itself to be cultivating the qualities of her Heart.¹ These Immaculate Heart communities of Southern California have a complex, even dramatic, history in this landscape, a history which gives a glimpse of the extent to which Marian devotion is kaleidoscopic and the extent to which Mary herself is continually

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¹ This study is part of a larger study of Marian devotion in the archdiocese of Los Angeles that I have been undertaking for some time. For another offshoot of the study, see Wendy M. Wright, *Mary and the Catholic Imagination: Le Point Vierge*, 2010 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2011).

re-conceptualized over time in response to changing social, political and theological agendas. Thus the story which charts the meaning of Mary's Immaculate Heart in Southern California, especially the archdiocese of Los Angeles, is but one chapter in a larger and many-voiced narrative about the ways that particular image has been variously understood. So this essay will briefly situate that specific chapter within the larger narrative which first takes shape in early modern Catholic Europe.

Early Modern Catholic Europe

Like most popular devotions, the Immaculate Heart of Mary has scriptural roots. Twice Mary is described in the Gospel of Luke—at the angel's proclamation of her pregnancy, and when, as a child, Jesus was found in the temple teaching the elders—as “holding,” “treasuring,” or “pondering” these mysteries in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51). That same gospel contains the prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:35) that foretells a “piercing” of her soul, understood by later commentators to refer to her heart. However, sustained reflection on Mary and the quality of her heart, her *interiority*, only blossomed in the early modern Catholic world, particularly in France, alongside the emergence of a newly interiorized Catholic spirituality. During the European Reformations (both Protestant and Catholic), faith came to be understood in a newly interior, spiritualized fashion. Scholars, such as Donna Spivey Ellington, link this change with several factors including the cultural transition from an oral to a literate society.² Stress was newly put upon inward prayer and moral convictions for all Christians, not only monastics, more than on the external means of communicating with God as had been typical in the medieval world. The quality of a person's heart now mattered. Virtues, those practiced habits of heart, were to be cultivated.

² On early modern changes in the Virgin's image see Donna Spivey Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001). She bases many of her observations about the transition from an oral to a literate culture on the work of Walter Ong.

Along with the new spiritual emphasis, a fresh image of the Virgin Mary emerged. In the late medieval period, Mary had been chiefly honored because of her motherhood: for the fact that she bore the Christ into the world. She was important precisely because of her intimate bodily relationship to the Savior. That is not to say that she did not have immense status. She did. For centuries she had been acknowledged as *Theotokos* or God-bearer, was venerated as the Second Eve (paired with Jesus the Second Adam), and had been identified as Mother of the Church. Plus, throughout the medieval era, she was regally honored as Queen of heaven, Queen of Saints, and Intercessor. In addition, there had been growing emphasis in late medieval piety on the Virgin's suffering, especially as it related to her Son.³

Yet the emphasis was upon her physical, maternal relationship with Jesus. While devotion to Mary's heart was not utterly new in the early modern era—Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux are credited with prayers to her as the human contemplative ideal who disposed herself to become mother of God, and Bernardino of Siena preached rapturously of the fiery heart of the Mother of God—it was not until the seventeenth century that a formal devotion to the Heart of Mary gained momentum. Moreover, insights about the significance of Mary's unique *interiority* had to wait until the early modern period and a shift in the spiritual currents of a newly emerging reformed Catholicism. It was at that point, Mary's heart, as symbol of the nature and quality of her personhood, truly came to the fore.⁴

³ Donna Spivey-Ellington, "Impassioned Mother or Passive Icon: The Virgin Mary's Role in Late Medieval and Early Modern Passion Sermons," *Renaissance Quarterly* 4 (1995): 227-61.

⁴ Spivey Ellington, in *From Sacred Body*, 186, points out that "The official Catholic presentation of Mary during and after the Council of Trent was in most cases more subdued [than it had been previously]. Her position in the scheme of Catholic theology was clarified and her complete dependence upon God for all her graces and merits received greater emphasis. Controversial aspects of traditional Marian piety and belief which the Church felt to be essential, such as her perpetual virginity, were retained, and the right of the Church to determine correct doctrine and practice was declared sufficient proof of their validity.... Catholic preachers appropriated the same personal inward piety that had so influenced the Protestant movement, as a means of urging Christians, aided by grace, to remake themselves within and without."

Early modern exegetes explored the Lucan passages about Mary and her heart in new ways in response to changing times. The Virgin of the period was extolled as an exemplar of the new interiorized piety of the time; self-controlled, virtuous, especially humble and obedient, she was the mirror of what the model disciple was thought to be. She was also extolled as the model for religious life and of idealized womanhood. This modern Mary of the virtuous, introspective heart was highlighted in the spirituality of the popular writer and preacher Francis de Sales (d.1622) and described in the liturgical and theological writings of John Eudes (d. 1680). Exemplary of this emphasis was the Congregation of the Visitation of Holy Mary, co-founded by Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal.⁵ The congregation of the Visitation of Holy Mary was designed not only to be a community that sang the constant praises of the Mother of God—at the center of their communal prayer was the recitation of the Little Office of Our Lady—but Mary was also their spiritual abbess, mother superior and model. They were to practice *imitatio Mariae* by reproducing the virtues she exemplified. These were the specific virtues held up by early modern Catholicism and named by Bishop de Sales and Mother de Chantal as the “little virtues.” Mary was both model and mirror for the Visitandine in the practice of the hidden interior virtues of gentleness, simplicity, humility, cordiality, and patience.⁶

While much might be suggested about the inculcation of these sorts of virtues to create willing subjects of the emerging modern nation states, centralized ecclesial polities, and patriarchal family structures, suffice it to say that, on the positive side, these virtues also reflect the increasing literacy, spiritual self-reflection, and moral conviction that characterized

⁵ It should be noted that the designation of Mary's heart as immaculate was not current in this period. For example, Francis de Sales was devoted to the Virgin and championed the idea of her singular conception: he chose December 8 as the date for his Episcopal consecration. Yet he referred to that day as the Conception of the Virgin Mary. The use of the title Immaculate Heart would become ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, the century that would see the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

⁶ There is not one standardized list of Salesian “little virtues.” On this tradition, see Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004), Chap 3.

the Catholic Church of the early modern era. Mary's heart was the focus of pastoral emphasis and theological speculation. It was her intimacy with her Son—not through her bodily connection, but through her inner identity—that gained attention. Devotion to the Two Hearts, of Jesus and his Mother, a devotion that was given liturgical and theological grounding by Jean Eudes, had its roots in the same early modern period, and is a variant of this spiritual emphasis.

The Nineteenth Century

Devotion to the Heart of Mary continued to grow throughout Europe in the following centuries. It also evolved in new ways in response to changing political, social and theological realities. Political upheavals and anti-monarchical and anti-clerical revolutionary sentiment swept through Europe. Especially in France, religious orders were suppressed, seminaries closed, and the ministries that religious communities sponsored abandoned. Churches were vacant, and young people, flocking to the cities in response to the economic pressures of the industrial revolution, were uneducated, un-catechized and vulnerable. In the Parisian capital, the enterprising pastor of Our Lady of Victory Church, Fr. Duffriche-Desgenettes, concerned about his empty pews and the state of souls, launched an archconfraternity, which was approved by Rome in 1838, to pray for conversions. There, under the title of the Immaculate Heart, Mary was invoked to intercede on behalf of sinners. Mary's pivotal role in the continuing redemption of humankind in the risen Christ was conceived in the theology of the day as flowing from the intimate connection she shared with her Son, the union of her heart with His in charity. But, as with much Catholic piety of the time, there was an evangelistic militancy, a sense of battle with modernization and secularization, in the way that devotion was popularized. Mary was portrayed as a powerful figure who could be invoked against all that seemed to threaten the Church which was in a defensive posture against the modern world.⁷ The success of the archconfraternity in Paris was stunning: dramatic conversions and a resurgence

⁷ It should parenthetically be recalled that her apparitions to three shepherd children at Fátima in Portugal on the 13th day of six consecutive months in 1917 are an extension of this militant Marian moment. In response to the oracles emerging from

of piety took place. Other churchmen throughout Europe began to pay attention.

In Spain in the region of Catalonia, Canon Joaquin Masmitjá de Puig (1808-1886) founded a chapter of the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart in his own pastoral arena. As this archconfraternity grew in popularity, Masmitjá dreamed of creating a community of religiously minded women who could respond to the pressing spiritual and educational needs of the many young girls who crowded into the cities. These women would have to profess "simple" (not "solemn") vows, because formally constituted religious orders were forbidden by the government. In 1848 his dream was realized. He named them the Daughters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary. Their relationship to the Virgin under that title was specified. As the community's aims were evangelical and apostolic—they began with catechesis and soon received permission to teach secular subjects—so was their prayer apostolic. In their earliest rules and customs, Fr. Masmitjá insisted that his charges have a strong devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as a powerful intercessor and dedicate themselves, along with their educational work, to praying through her for sinners.

Masmitjá's foundation was part of a trend in the Spain of the time. His contemporary, Anthony Claret (1807-1870), founder of the Congregation of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (the Claretians), came from the Catalanian region.⁸ The foundations that these two notable churchmen made testify to the growing popularity of the title in the region. Their choice was not merely honorific, but reflects a specific and appropriate understanding of the Immaculate Heart which in turn was a product of the tumultuous times in which

Fatima in 1942, Pope Pius XII performed a Marian consecration, entrusting not only the Catholic Church but the whole human race to the Virgin Mary. The consecration was made in the context of the reported messages of Our Lady of Fatima which had requested Marian consecrations. The October 31, 1942, consecration was performed via a Portuguese radio broadcast, and then renewed on December 8, 1942, in Rome.

⁸ The Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Rome came to Southern California by way of Mexico in the early 1900s, working in Los Angeles' inner city missions. The Claretians have operated the historic *La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora Reina de los Angeles* in Pueblo de Los Angeles near Downtown Los Angeles since 1908.

these men lived as well as the devotional renaissance that accompanied it. The evangelizing intent on the part of these Catholics, confronted with what they saw as an impious and apostate world, is evident.

Southern California Mid-Nineteenth Century

A small group of the newly constituted Spanish Daughters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary came to Southern California only a few years after their founding, at the behest of the bishop of the young diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles, Vincentian Thaddeus Amat, himself a native of the region of Catalonia.⁹ Bishop Amat had need of a congregation of women to found and staff new educational and charitable institutions in the frontier diocese on the western edge of what had been Mexican, and was soon to be American, territory.¹⁰ The community brought with them their apostolic devotion to Mary's Heart as one that could effect great things on behalf of the evangelizing faith. Thus their early custom books prescribed, along with widely practiced Marian-focused devotions such as the recitation of the Little Office of Our Lady or the Litany of Our Lady, prayers and practices that related specifically to them as Daughters of the Immaculate Heart. Each sister wore a Seven Dolors' rosary and weekly said the chaplet of the Seven Dolors (Seven Sorrows of Mary). The sisters consecrated themselves to the Immaculate Heart, made reparation to that

⁹ Thaddeus Amat was ordained bishop in Rome in 1854. Amat arrived in the pueblo of Los Angeles in 1855. Recognizing the growth of Los Angeles and the decline of Monterey, he petitioned the Vatican to move the see to Los Angeles and to be known as Bishop of Los Angeles. On July 7, 1859, the diocese was renamed Diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles.

¹⁰ On the founding of the Daughters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary, see the essay from the Immaculate Heart Community archives by Juan Manuel Lozano, *The Immaculate Heart Sisters: A Historical and Doctrinal Study on Their Mission and Spirit in the Church* (Claretian Private Printing, 1974). Other sources include *Book of Customs for the Daughters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary* (Province of California, 1914) and *Manual of Prayers, The California Institute of the Sisters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Los Angeles, 1947).

Heart for the sins heaped upon it by a godless world, and daily after dinner recited the following prayer:

Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.
August Queen of Heaven, Sovereign Mistress of Angels,
You who from the beginning have received
from God the power and the mission
to crush the head of Satan,
we humbly ask you to send your holy legions,
that under your orders and through your power,
they may pursue the demons, combat them everywhere,
repress their audacity,
and drive them back to the abyss.
Holy Angels and Arch-Angels, defend and guard us.
O good and tender Mother, you shall always be
the object of our love and our hope. Amen.¹¹

As the region prospered, the work of the community increased: they became an ubiquitous presence in the southern California region.¹² The historic leadership of the Immaculate Heart congregation included many immensely capable and energetic women charged with doing the yeoman's work

¹¹ *Manual of Prayers, The California Institute of the Sisters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Los Angeles, 1947), Immaculate Heart Community Archives, Los Angeles.

¹² In 1911, a group of Immaculate Heart sisters from California, along with several from Spain, went to Mexico to start schools. Forced to leave because of the Mexican Revolution, they established a community in Tucson, Arizona, at the behest of Bishop Granjon in 1911. They founded schools and continue to teach in schools in Arizona and across the United States. They were not involved in the split which took place later in California. Another American congregation was founded under the aegis of the Immaculate Heart. Belgian Louis Florent Gillet, classical scholar and linguist, entered the Redemptorist congregation in 1833. After ordination in 1838, he came to the United States, led a missionary band to Detroit, with a second foundation in Monroe, Michigan. Louis wanted women religious to educate girls. His hope matched that of Theresa Maxis, a member of the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore. Together the two established the (now) Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Nov. 10, 1845) in Monroe. The Monroe IHM community shares a common origin with three other religious communities: Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Scranton, Pennsylvania; Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Immaculata, Pennsylvania; and the OSP IHM in Baltimore, Maryland. These congregations have no connection with the group founded by de Puig.

of a fledgling Catholic outpost. After several decades, in 1924, sensing that the context of their ministry called for a different pastoral approach to ministry than was common in the old world, the community sought and gained independence from the Spanish mother community. As an American order, they exchanged the name of Daughters for Sisters and went about their ground-breaking ministries.

Mid-Twentieth to Twenty-First Century¹³

It was in the wake of Vatican II, in the 1960s, that this talented group of women, used to taking responsibility for their lives and the lives of those in their ministerial charge, began a process of discernment. Many in the community felt inspired by the directives of the Second Vatican Council, as well as by the currents of scriptural and liturgical renewal sweeping through the Church and the developing tradition of Catholic social teaching, to reexamine who they were, to pursue higher education, and to expand the boundaries of traditionally practiced religious life. The story is a complex one, the specific arc of whose narrative—without the benefit of long hindsight—is still considered by some a matter of contention.¹⁴ Suffice it to say that the unthinkable happened: in the year 1970, the reigning Los Angeles ecclesiastic, Cardinal

¹³ For a look at Mary's heart through a different mid-twentieth century lens, see John F. Murphy, "The Popes and the Immaculate Heart," *The Marian Era: World Annual of the Queen of the Universe* 3 (1962): 65-67, 88-91 (published by the Franciscan Herald Press for the Franciscan National Marian Commission).

¹⁴ For the hind-sight perspective of the present-day ecumenical community, see the book written by the former IHM superior, Anita Casper, *Witness to Integrity: The Crisis of the Immaculate Heart Community in California* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003). Because many of the principals in the conflict are still alive, documents relating to the disbanding of the Immaculate Heart Sisters held in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles are not available for public use. For another, less commendatory perspective, see Francis J. Weber, *His Eminence of Los Angeles: James Cardinal Francis McIntyre* (St. Francis Historical Society, 1997). American historian Mark S. Massa, SJ, outlines the issues in the IHM split in *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day and the Notre Dame Football Team* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1999), 172ff. Massa's newest work provides an even more thorough and contextualized account of the events. See his *The American Catholic Revolution: How the 60s Changed the Church Forever* (Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chap. 5.

James Francis McIntyre, presided over the formal dispensation of the vows of 350 of the approximately 400 Immaculate Heart sisters. The majority of the sisters felt that, despite the Cardinal's insistence, they could not draw back on the discernment and the changes that they had implemented in response to the Council. The remaining fifty or so sisters continued in vowed religious life and continued the patterns they had previously followed. The traditional Catholic press of the time excoriated the disbanded group and lauded the remnant that remained.¹⁵

From the dispensed group a core decided to reorganize as a volunteer lay community. Over the years that community has continued its development: now, not only Catholic lay women but married couples and families from varying Christian denominations form an ecumenical association who through their various activities are dedicated to spiritual nurture and the promotion of justice and the common good. The Immaculate Heart Community continues to sponsor many of its original ministries, including a large retreat facility in Santa Barbara, a middle school, and an all-girls high school in the Los Feliz district of Los Angeles.¹⁶ In addition, the scope of IHM Community ministries now extends to collaborative projects in theological education, women's education, health care, battered-women shelters, art education, low-cost housing, and environmental justice.

Mary's Immaculate Heart is still invoked in the early twenty-first century by this community. However, the Virgin's inner life is conceptualized very differently than it was even a century

¹⁵ For historical newsprint articles that disapproved of the IHM decisions, see the April 15, 1971 issue of *The Wanderer* and the October 24, 1971 issue of *Twin Circle* located in the Sutton Marian Clippings File at The Marian Library, University of Dayton. Until recently the group that remained under canonical vows operated a small retreat center in the Los Feliz area of Los Angeles. The remainder of its property continues to operate as a retreat facility for priests. The canonical order seems not to be present in the diocese as of 2011. Their devotional practices continued to be shaped by the pre-Vatican II tradition.

¹⁶ On the ministries of the early IHMs in California until 1940, see Marian Sharples' 1963 unpublished manuscript in the Los Angeles Immaculate Heart Community Archives, "All Things Remain in God."

ago. In the course of my research, I first discovered the evolving, kaleidoscopic heart of Mary Immaculate as refracted by the IHMs in a speech given by Dr. Alexis Navarro, a member of the re-imagined Immaculate Heart Community. Navarro spoke about the history and charism of the contemporary IHMs at a 1998 gathering at Mount Saint Mary's College where, at the time, she was teaching and involved in administration. Apropos of the Heart of the Virgin, Navarro waxed eloquent about the updated devotion to that Immaculate Heart to which the late-twentieth century ecumenical community now ascribed. She critiqued what she felt was the "maudlin" Marian piety of the earlier sisters. Instead, she stated that

... The newly conceptualized community saw itself as carrying forward the Deuteronomic command: "Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul and with your whole mind and love your neighbor as yourself." It is understood that it is in the heart where freedom dwells; it is in the heart where the Spirit is heard. ... A heart prepared for ministry, for generosity, for outgoing joy, for lightness and humor, for compassion and sorrow, for a spirit of courage, daring and challenge that Mary experienced in giving flesh to Jesus. ... This is the IHM spirit and the heart that carries us forward even today.¹⁷

Navarro's view exemplifies what the leadership of the reconstituted community now understands to be the deepest meaning of having a heart like the Virgin: an apostolic heart still, but differently oriented toward the world than previously conceived; less adversarial and more service directed, reflective of the spirit of the Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.

A second glimpse of the kaleidoscopic heart was offered to me on the campus of Immaculate Heart High School in Los Angeles during the annual spring celebration of Mary's Day in 2005.¹⁸ In preparation for the visit I had pored over IHM

¹⁷ The quoted unpublished speech by Dr. Alexis Navarro, IHM, was given July 23, 1998, at Mount Saint Mary's College, Los Angeles, California. It was supplied with permission by Dr. Navarro.

¹⁸ The expansion of the traditional May crowning into the Mary's Day celebrations was the brain-child of Sr. Corita and other sister-artists in the late 1950s and 1960s.

archival photos of previous school Mary's Day celebrations from the decades before the new community was formed. In the early photos, in continuity with celebrations that began when the school opened its doors in 1906, veiled sisters in long sepia-toned habits were visible, shepherding their neatly attired Catholic girls' school charges through the traditional May processions. White-gloved young women wore wreaths of flowers in their hair as they solemnly enacted the May crowning of the Virgin. By the late 1960s snapshots of the school May festivities captured the seismic changes of that turbulent decade. Colorfully dressed students and fully habited sisters, all wearing fanciful floral head gear, were blowing up balloons. A "dragon" parade consisting of serpentine lines of girls crouching under upturned pop-art decorated cardboard boxes celebrated John XXIII's justice-focused encyclical *Peace on Earth*. More habited nuns were visible, one waving a placard of a Hawaiian pineapple advertisement amidst a sea of costumed students protesting the commoditization of food—"Food Is Holy! Give them something to Eat, said Jesus!"

Down the hall from the archives where these photos were stored is the office where the artwork of the late Sr. Corita, known after the events of 1970 as Corita Kent, is marketed. Corita, like most of her sisters in the IHM (although not her blood sister who remained with the contingent whose vows were not dispensed) threw open their windows and embraced the modern world. Corita's art grew with her adventurous spirit. I perused the plastic display folders that list the prints she created. I could see her Marian depictions evolve from typical—*fiat, Magnificat*, heart—to whimsical.

Mary's Day 2005 seemed to continue the tradition of IHM transformation. Experience it with me: In the fifth year of the new millennium, the now vibrantly multi-ethnic student body gathers for the opening Eucharistic celebration in the school gymnasium which has been festooned for the occasion with filmy leaf-covered fabric banners, paper flowers dangling overhead from thin threads, and paper vines curling up the walls. A vegetative fabric "baldequino" is looped over an altar set in the middle of the space as visual accompaniment to the theme of this year's Mary's Day, "Plant the Good Seed." Mass opens with two circles of young women carrying glittery egg-shaped

"seeds" and processing to the subtle beat of Native American drums. As the celebration unfolds, antiphons and texts weave together to amplify the chosen themes: earth, womb, creativity. These young women of Immaculate Heart are to dedicate themselves to mothering the earth and to planting and nurturing the seed of faith within them that will sustain the world. With God all things are seen to be possible, and Mary is named as the role model and pattern of creative strength, courage, and faith.

Fr. Greg Boyle, a southern California Jesuit known for his ministry to gang members in the troubled barrios of east L.A. and a favorite of the IHMs, presides at the Eucharist. His homily emerges from the reading of the day, the *Magnificat*, that liberating gospel canticle sung by the Virgin Mary in the second chapter of Luke. The Virgin, our Jesuit presider affirms, did not merely *proclaim* the message of the *Magnificat*, Mary *became* the message. He amplifies his point with a contemporary story about Soledad, the mother of four sons caught up in the L.A. gang wars, two of whom had been murdered. One grim night, as she held vigil in the hospital emergency room for her dying son, Soledad became aware that a sixteen-year-old member of a rival gang had been brought in and placed in a neighboring bed. She overheard as the doctors labored to save his life: "I'm afraid we're losing him," they murmured. Despite the fact of her own pain, this grieving mother found herself praying for the boy and for his family. He survived. When the grieving Soledad reached out to the enemy, Fr. Boyle insists, she had a heart like Mary of the *Magnificat*; she not only proclaimed it, she *was* the message. And *we*, the ardent Jesuit addresses the gathered student body, must *be* the message as well. It will change the world. For Fr. Boyle and the IHM community, Mary's heart evidences the virtues of radical forgiveness, the option for the poor and love of enemies.

At the conclusion of the liturgy, the girls, free of their customary school uniforms and glorying in their spring attire, clamor out of the auditorium to a large grassy quadrangle in whose center a maypole has been erected. They assemble, facing a foliage-covered hill at the pinnacle of which an antique statue of Mary has been set up. Then a May-crowning procession and a musical interlude, which would *not* have been a

surprise to the long-ago student body, takes place. The traditional strains of the Marian hymn "Immaculate Mary," sung *a capella* by a musically gifted senior, wafts in the air, and Mary receives her flowered crown at the hands of a specially honored young woman. But just as the sweet soprano dies away, the vibrant rhythms of African tribal music burst out from the loudspeakers situated at both ends of the lawn. The girls immediately break into the steps of a dance practiced for the occasion, then swirl spontaneously into a long conga line and shimmy their way over to the refreshment area, laughing and whooping out end-of-the-school-year cries of delight.

Two years later, in 2007, I was offered a final glimpse of the newly conceptualized habits of Mary's heart at the Immaculate Heart Center for Spiritual Renewal in Montecito, the site of the early IHM novitiate. The quality of the Virgin's Heart was the topic of a conversation I held with Carol and Anita, two members of the ecumenical community who were formed as young religious in this very spot in the years before the 1970s split. When they entered as novices, Carol and Anita were given manuals of prayer that encouraged them to venerate, reflect on, and imitate the virtues of Mary. They prayed the Little Office of Our Lady, the Seven Dolors Chaplet, and the Immaculate Heart Novena. Carol said, however, that few of them had entered the order because of Marian devotion. Rather, they were drawn to the teaching work of the Immaculate Heart Sisters and the joyful spirit they found there.

As they matured, Carol and Anita did in fact begin consciously to model themselves on Mary and to consider the qualities of her heart. However, they did not experience her as a pious girl conformed to conventional expectations or one who summoned angelic help in the fight against evil, but rather a woman who listened deeply and trusted enough to be obedient to the voice of God. She was model for those who pondered things in their hearts. In other words, the IHMs saw Mary engaging in a thoughtful, often risky, spiritual process of discernment, trying to uncover the promptings of the often surprising Spirit of God amid the conflicting cultural, psychological and spiritual promptings that assail us all. It was fidelity to the process of spiritual discernment that led to the innovations in

the Immaculate Heart community in the 1960s and 70s, and it is that same fidelity to discernment that they understand themselves to be engaged in today—discernment that has led to an ecumenical communion and dedication to justice and environmental advocacy. For these women, the swords that pierced the Virgin's heart are no longer a signal that they need to make reparation for the sins of a godless, modern world, but a symbol of their solidarity with the poor and outcast who are the focus of many of their ministries. This re-conceptualized heart of Mary reflects the growing influence in America of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries of Catholic social thought, as well as an increased cultural and theological sensitivity to the role of women and the endangered environment.

From the beveled glass doors of the elegantly appointed building in which Carol, Anita and I conversed, I could see a traditional white plaster statue of Mary of the Immaculate Heart situated on a stone pedestal at the crest of a rock-strewn path: her head slightly bowed, with one hand she points to the heart, surmounted by a cross and ringed with thorn-studded rose blossoms, that is visible upon her breast. This flower-ringed and sword-pierced heart has been from its Spanish beginnings the symbol that expressed the vision of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart. But the insights offered by Carol and Anita, and Alexis Navarro's encomium about the heart of an IHM and what the Jesuit preacher and the dancing young women at Mary's Day see symbolized in that heart are not exactly what the first Spanish sisters who journeyed to the New World saw. Instead they represent an explicit setting aside of other images of Mary, certainly the Mary in whose shadow women such as Carol, Anita and Alexis had grown up, as well as the Mary under whose aegis the early Immaculate Heart Sisters were formed, and the submissive, docile albeit discerning Mary of the early modern Catholic Reformation.¹⁹

¹⁹ For another very contemporary perspective on the Immaculate Heart devotion, see Sarah Jane Boss, "The Immaculate Heart of Mary: Visions for the World," in *The Church and Mary: Papers Read at the 2001 Summer Meeting and the 2002 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Great Britain: The Boydell Press, 2004): 319-348.

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